



Reader/Writer Notebook

Use your **RWN** to complete the activities for this selection.

Literary Focus

Extended Metaphor A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things without using the words *like* or *as*. Sometimes writers extend a metaphor—that is, they take it as far as it can logically be developed. An **extended metaphor** develops the comparison over a number of lines and with several examples. In “The Chambered Nautilus,” Holmes compares the life span of the nautilus to the progress of the human soul. As you read the poem, pay attention to how he develops this metaphor.

Reading Focus

Finding the Main Idea The **main idea** of a poem is its principal message, theme, or insight—the point that the poet is trying to make. Holmes conveys his main idea about spiritual growth through an extended metaphor. As you read, focus on each part of the comparison. When you encounter difficult lines, you may need to re-read and then paraphrase them, or restate them in your own words.

Into Action To uncover the poem’s main idea, use a chart like the one below to paraphrase various parts of the extended metaphor as you read.

Lines	Quotation	Paraphrase
1–2	“This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign, / Sails the unshad- owed main.”	The chambered nautilus is like a ship made of pearl, and it is, as poets imagine, going on a voyage.

Writing Focus

Think as a Reader/Writer

Find It in Your Reading The Romantics believed that humans could find beauty and truth by reflecting on the natural world. As you read, notice the speaker’s close observations of the nautilus’s appearance and actions. In your *Reader/Writer Notebook*, make a list of words and images that reveal a careful attention to the natural world.



1.3.11.C.2 Analyze the effectiveness, in terms of literary quality, of the author’s use of literary devices: Figurative language. **1.1.11.D** Identify, describe, evaluate and synthesize the essential ideas in text. Assess those reading strategies that were most effective in learning from a variety of texts.

Vocabulary

venturous (VEHN chuhr uhs) *adj.*: bold; daring; adventurous. *The poet admires the venturesome spirit of the chambered nautilus.*

unfurl (uhn FURL) *v.*: spread out or unfold. *To grow, the chambered nautilus will unfurl in a widening spiral.*

crypt (krihpt) *n.*: underground burial chamber. *The poet sees the broken chambered nautilus as a crypt that has been broken open.*

lustrous (LUHS truhs) *adj.*: shining; glossy. *Like many shells, the chambered nautilus has a lustrous surface.*

forlorn (fawr LAWRN) *adj.*: deserted; miserable; hopeless. *The chambered nautilus has been washed ashore, broken and forlorn.*

Language Coach

Word Definitions When you learn a new word, connect it to an image or word that will help you to remember the word and its meaning. With the word *unfurl*, for example, picture a flag spreading out in the wind or think of the rhyming word *uncurl*.



Learn It Online

Get to know the vocabulary words online with Word Watch.

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POEM

THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS

by **Oliver Wendell Holmes**

Read with a Purpose

Read to discover how the poet's observations of the natural world provide insight into the human soul.

Build Background

A relative of the octopus and the squid, the chambered nautilus is a snail-like sea creature native to the South Pacific and Indian Oceans. During its lifetime, the nautilus grows from the size of a tiny bead to the size of a pumpkin. As it transforms, the nautilus creates new

chambers of its shell to house its body. The name *nautilus*, from a Greek word meaning "sailor," comes from an old belief that the creature could actually use its shell as a ship in which it sailed. Unique in many ways, the chambered nautilus inspired both the scientist and the poet in Oliver Wendell Holmes.

The first three stanzas of the poem are a meditation on the life and death of the nautilus. The final two stanzas use **apostrophe**, a direct address to someone or something that is not present.

This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,^o
 Sails the unshadowed main^o,—
 The venturous bark^o that flings
 On the sweet summer wind its purpled wings
 5 In gulfs enchanted, where the siren^o sings,
 And coral reefs lie bare,
 Where the cold sea maids^o rise to sun their streaming hair. **A**

Its webs of living gauze no more unfurl;
 Wrecked is the ship of pearl!
 10 And every chambered cell,
 Where its dim dreaming life was wont to dwell,
 As the frail tenant shaped his growing shell,
 Before thee lies revealed,—
 Its irised^o ceiling rent,^o its sunless crypt unsealed!

1. feign (fayn): archaic for "imagine."

2. the unshadowed main: archaic for "the sunlit sea."

3. bark: archaic for "a sailing ship."

5. siren: in Greek mythology, one of a group of sea maidens whose seductive singing lures sailors to wreck their ships on coastal rocks.

7. sea maids: mermaids or sea nymphs.

14. irised (Y rihst): iridescent; rainbowlike. Iris is the Greek goddess of the rainbow.

rent: torn.

A Literary Focus Extended Metaphor In this stanza, Holmes compares the nautilus's shell to a ship. Choose three details he includes, and explain how they help extend the metaphor.

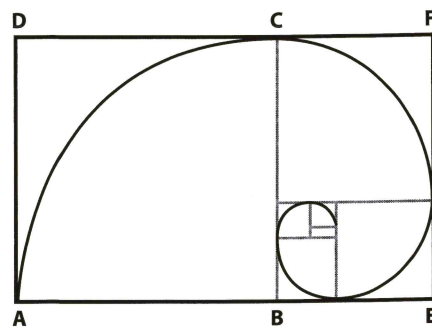
Vocabulary **venturous** (VEHN chuhr uhs) *adj.*: bold; daring; adventurous.

unfurl (uhn FURL) *v.*: spread out or unfold.

crypt (krihpt) *n.*: underground burial chamber.

Proportion

If you look at the photograph on page 234, you can see why artists admire the structure of the chambered nautilus shell. The shell spirals outward from the center in a beautiful, ever-widening curve. The nautilus has what artists call proportion—a pleasing balance between all the parts of an object or image. You can further appreciate the nautilus shell's natural perfection by looking at it in relation to what is called the golden section—an arrangement of ever-smaller rectangles, each a mirror image of the others. Look at the illustration; the eye can see it before the mind can grasp it.



Golden section, with spiral showing proportion.

Ask Yourself

How can you tell that Holmes admired proportion in the chambered nautilus? Explain.

- 15 Year after year beheld the silent toil
That spread his **lustrous** coil;
Still, as the spiral grew,
He left the past year's dwelling for the new,
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
20 Built up its idle door,
Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old no more.

- Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,
Child of the wandering sea,
Cast from her lap, **forlorn**!
25 From thy dead lips a clearer note is born
Than ever Triton blew from wreathèd horn!^o
While on mine ear it rings,
Through the deep caves of thought I hear a voice that sings:—

- Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
30 As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past! **B**
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
35 Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

B Reading Focus Finding the Main Idea How does the instruction to "Leave thy low-vaulted past!" relate to Holmes's main idea?

Vocabulary **lustrous** (LUHS truhs) *adj.*: shining; glossy.
forlorn (fawr LAWRN) *adj.*: deserted; miserable; hopeless.

26. than . . . wreathèd horn:

echoes a line from "The World Is Too Much with Us," a sonnet by the English poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850): "Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn." In Greek mythology, Triton is a sea god, often represented as blowing a trumpet made from a conch shell. *Wreathèd* means "coiled" or "spiral-shaped."

Applying Your Skills

The Chambered Nautilus

PA 1.3.11.C.2 Analyze the effectiveness, in terms of literary quality, of the author's use of literary devices: Figurative language. Also covered 1.1.11.D; 1.5.11.D.5

Respond and Think Critically

Reading Focus

Quick Check

1. Describe the chambered nautilus. What kind of creature is it? Where does it live?
2. What happens when the nautilus outgrows its chamber?
3. The third stanza makes an implicit comparison between the nautilus and a person who changes homes. What details contribute to this comparison?

Read with a Purpose

4. How does the poet's close observation of the nautilus lead to insights about the human soul?

Reading Skills: Finding the Main Idea

5. While reading the poem, you paraphrased difficult lines. Re-read the information in your chart. Then, add a column that shows how each line relates to the poem's main idea.

Lines	Quotation	Paraphrase	How It Relates to the Main Idea
1-2	"This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign, / Sails the unshadowed main."	The nautilus is like a ship made of pearl, and it is, as poets imagine, going on a voyage.	The chambered nautilus is like the human soul on an earthly voyage.

Literary Focus

Literary Analysis

6. **Infer** Based on the images Holmes uses in the first stanza, what can you infer about his feelings toward the nautilus and its journey?

7. **Summarize** Summarize what has happened to the nautilus in the second stanza.

8. **Analyze** Who or what is the subject of the apostrophe in each of the last two stanzas? What is the main idea of each of these stanzas, and why do you think Holmes uses apostrophe here?

Literary Skills: Extended Metaphor

9. **Analyze** Step by step, explain the fifth stanza's extended metaphor comparing the life span of the nautilus and the progress of the human soul. Explain the "stately mansions" (line 29), the "low-vaulted past" (line 31), "each new temple" (line 32), the "outgrown shell" (line 35), and the "unresting sea" (line 35).

Literary Skills Review: Allusion

10. **Interpret** An **allusion** is a reference to someone or something from history, literature, religion, politics, science, or some other branch of culture. Summarize the lines that allude to Triton. Why might Holmes have wanted to allude to a Romantic poet?

Writing Focus

Think as a Reader/Writer

Use It in Your Writing Review your list of words and images that show Holmes's careful attention to the natural world. Choose something in nature that you find interesting. Write a short poem or paragraph describing it in detail.

What Do
You
Think
Now

What do you think initially drew Holmes to the chambered nautilus as a poetic subject? Why do you think he found it inspiring?

Preparing to Read

from Nature *from Self-Reliance*



Where does an individual find inspiration?



QuickWrite

Emerson found nature exhilarating. How does nature serve as a source of inspiration? Write a paragraph explaining the uplifting effects of nature.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (c. 1867) by William Henry Furness, Jr.



MEET THE WRITER

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

Ralph Waldo Emerson was one of those rare writers who appealed both to intellectuals and to the general public. Emerson, an immensely popular lecturer, had a distinctly American perspective that denied the importance of the past. Instead, he urged people to focus on humanity and find inspiration in nature.

A Young Rebel

Emerson was born in Boston in 1803 to a family that was cultured but poor. After his father, a Unitarian minister, died when Emerson was seven years old, Emerson and his five siblings were raised by his mother and aunt.

Emerson entered Harvard at fourteen, and after graduation he prepared himself to become a minister, like the eight generations of Emersons before him. In 1829, at the age of twenty-five, he accepted a post at Boston's Second Church. He soon married Ellen Tucker, who died seventeen months later.

Emerson's grief coincided with a growing disbelief in some of the central doctrines of his religion. In 1832, he shocked his congregation by resigning from the ministry and setting off on an extended tour of Europe. There he met and conversed with the English Romantic poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as well as other influential writers.

A Trusted Guide

Returning to the United States in late 1833, Emerson settled in Concord, Massachusetts, and remarried. He began giving lectures, and his novel ideas eventually became popular.

With the author's growing fame, Concord became a destination for truth-seeking young people who looked to Emerson as their guide. The young responded to Emerson's predictions that they were on the verge of a new age; intellectuals responded to his philosophical ideas about the relations among humanity, nature, and God; and society as a whole responded to his optimism.

Although Emerson spoke publicly less often in his later years, his popularity did not diminish. He died in 1882.

Think About the Writer

In what way did Emerson have to let go of the past in order to follow his own path in life?